



June 2, 2016

Clay County recognizes local service members



Service members from area commands in Jacksonville, Florida gather with David Goldberg, chair-elect for the Clay County Chamber Board of Directors, left, and VyStar Credit Union President and CEO Terry West, right, after being recognized during the Clay Chamber Military Appreciation Luncheon at the Thrasher-Horne Conference Center in Clay County May 26. (U.S. Navy Photo/Released)

JACKSONVILLE, Fla. – Service members from Naval Air Station (NAS) Jacksonville, Blount Island Command and Camp Blanding Joint Training Center were honored at the annual Clay County Military Appreciation Luncheon at the Thrasher-Horne Conference Center in Orange Park, Fla., May 26.

The luncheon, hosted by the Clay County Chamber of Commerce and VyStar Credit Union, began with presentation of the colors by the Ridgeview High School Color Guard, singing of the national anthem, invocation and a short tribute to prisoners of war and those missing in action.

“Our way of life has been defended and continues to be defended by many of you in this room today. Today we honor the service of not only the great men and women who currently serve in our armed forces from the Northeast Florida region, but also those who have served our country so honorably at pivotal moments in our history,” said Clay County Chamber of Commerce President Doug Conkey.

He also asked all veterans and those who serve the public to stand for a round of applause.

VyStar Credit Union President and Chief Executive Officer Terry West also offered his gratitude to the service members.

“On behalf of our VyStar members, officials and employees it’s our privilege to sponsor this event as we take time to thank those serving in the military and civil service, past and present, and the families for what you do for our community,” he said.

West then introduced the keynote speaker, Capt. Chuck Stuart, commanding officer, Fleet Readiness Center



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Southeast (FRCSE), who thanked Clay County representatives for their continued support to the military and gave a brief overview about the command.

"We perform in-depth overhaul, repair, and modification of aircraft, engines, and aeronautical components for almost every aircraft the Navy flies," said Stuart. "We work on components for cutting edge platforms like the F-35 Joint Strike Fighter, the P-8 Poseidon and H-60 Romeo helicopter. In addition, we are performing maintenance and repair to extend the lifespan of the F/A-18 Hornet fighter attack aircraft. This work is critical for the Navy's readiness.

We are the largest employer in the Northeast Florida/Southeast Georgia area. So far this fiscal year, we've hired more than 200 new employees and are planning to add another 350 before the year is out. We're growing."

Stuart also thanked Clay County representatives for their continued support to the military.

"It is clear that the future of Fleet Readiness Center Southeast and that of Clay County are not separate, but intertwined," he said. "We depend on each other. I could not ask for a more supportive community."

After Stuart's remarks, Conkey announced Hospitalman Samantha Boddie of Naval Hospital as the recipient of this year's VyStar Award for Military Excellence.

"Wow! I never expected this - what a great honor and such a beautiful award," said Boddie, humbly after accepting her award. "I'm really grateful for this recognition and for being here today. I have only been stationed here for about a year, but really enjoy helping out my community."

Boddie earned the award for her outstanding work in the hospital's pediatric clinic and as a volunteer for the Guardian Ad Litem program. She has volunteered 98 off-duty hours advocating for abused and neglected children in Clay and Duval County Courts and also helps out the Jacksonville Miracle League assisting special needs children participate in sporting events.

Also recognized were six other Sailors from NAS Jacksonville, a Marine from Blount Island Command, several Soldiers from Camp Blanding Joint Training Center and a Coast Guardsman from Coast Guard Helicopter Interdiction Tactical Squadron. Each received a plaque and gifts from Clay County area businesses in appreciation for their outstanding service.

"I think it's an honor being recognized today by the Clay County Chamber of Commerce," said Aircrew Survival Equipmentman 3rd Class (AW) Yemaya Benta of Fleet Readiness Center Southeast. "I feel really blessed and really wasn't expecting this. I really enjoy giving back to the community and have participated in several volunteer events in Clay County. I help out with their Adopt-A-Mile program and help out at my church whenever I can."

Aviation Structural Mechanic 1st Class (AW) Dwayne Henry of Helicopter Maritime Strike Squadron 70 echoed that sentiment. "I really appreciate being honored by the Clay County community and all the local companies," he said. "It's great to see such tremendous support to the military."



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Aircrew Survival Equipmentman 3rd Class (AW) Yemaya Benta of Fleet Readiness Center Southeast, left, proudly accepts her Clay County military appreciation plaque May 26 from VyStar Credit Union President and CEO Terry West, center and David Goldberg, chair-elect for the Clay County Chamber Board of Directors. Clay County Chamber of Commerce and local sponsors recognize outstanding service members each year at a luncheon to thank them for their contributions to their country and the community. (U.S. Navy Photo/Released)



Fleet Readiness Center Southeast Commanding Officer Capt. Chuck Stuart discusses the importance of the command and its people not only to the warfighters but to the local community during the annual Clay Chamber Military Appreciation Luncheon May 26. Stuart thanked the community leaders for their support and stressed the value of maintaining cooperative partnerships. (U.S. Navy Photo/Released)